



Leadership and Bears


Recently within a day or two of each other, we had two newly minted Presidents ask what would be expected of them in a campaign. Both were quick to say this was all brand new to them and that they would make the campaign a priority, but they were wondering what that really meant.

Both of their institutions faced challenges that demanded a good deal of their time already. And neither institution had yet conducted a feasibility study so we were not in a position to respond based on the findings and recommendations from one. We suspect that they had heard varying prescriptions for how much time they would need to spend on the campaign.

With the caveat that we did not know what specifics a study might reveal, we told them that we needed two things from them. First, the President had to be able to articulate a vision for the future of the institution and the role of philanthropy in moving toward that vision and to do so with some passion. In other words, if you are going to do a major campaign, you ought to have a major reason why and you ought to be able to convey that with conviction.

Second, the President had to make it a priority to work with the top 25 to 30 prospective donors so that they would hear that vision and passion "up close and personal" from her or him and to do so with flexibility. Obviously, it is not possible to do all 25 or 30 at once so this is a systematic process that can be scheduled and ought to be planned at least three months ahead. But, flexibility is needed to respond to a donor when he or she calls or is in town unexpectedly or when their schedules change but they offer alternatives which must be seized or lost. Obviously, we could add lots of other wonderful things a President could do, but it seems to us that this is the short list needed to ensure a campaign's success.

A second question from each was about the economy and its possible impact on a campaign. We stressed that we had some confidence that no one knows the answer to what the economy is going to do. And, there was not time to go into a lengthy peroration on all of the variables. So, we gave a short answer from a quick look back. We surveyed a number of campaigns that have been wrapping up the last two years; most of them began around 2000 or 2001 and were seven- or eight- year campaigns. You might recall that 2000, 2001 and 2002 were three straight down years in the market. It appears to us that almost all of those campaigns exceeded goal, either the original one or an increased one. We found only one instance of a campaign that needed a little more time and it tacked on three months to get past goal. Not a bad record for starting off in the market doldrums.



David T. Shufflebarger, CFRE
Managing Partner